

**I**n early February, a California National Guard aviator flew an HH-60L helicopter right off a stateside factory's lot on the first leg of its journey to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

The two-month-old \$14 million helicopter, one of just two HH-60Ls now in Afghanistan, is the latest edition to the line of Blackhawks, and is designed specifically for medical evacuation. There are only 12 helicopters like it.

Sergeant. First Class Gary Volkman of the California National Guard's 126th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), now deployed to Afghanistan, flew with the HH-60L from the factory. He said his unit is lucky to have two of these rare Blackhawks. One was built in November and the other

## Two New Medevac helicopters deploy to Afghanistan with the 126th Medical Co.



PHOTO BY SARIAH CRULL AND SCOTT SMITH / BILL SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY (916) 452-4992

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in January. "These are the first two to be deployed," said Volkman, who is the acting first sergeant of a 24-hour standby all-paramedic team. Due to the many paramedic-friendly features the distinguished bubble-nosed helicopter possesses, it was decided Bagram would be its first deployment location.

The HH-60L has many features that make it easier for the paramedics. The stationary medical interior includes an onboard oxygen-generating system, provisions for medical electronics, a six-litter patient configuration, room for a medic and an essential individual, the latest infrared and navigational capabilities, a stormscope, and a 290-foot hoist.

During their first few weeks in Afghanistan, the medevac helicopters performed rescues dealing with land-mine accidents and incidents of children playing with explosive ordnance. 🐾